

United Nations

Press Release

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ Secretary-General expresses deep sorrow about onset of military confrontation last night in Persian Gulf; says hostilities come within framework of Security Council resolutions.
- ◆ Nine countries pledge some \$55 million to UNDRO Plan of Action for refugees leaving Iraq and Kuwait.
- ◆ International Committee of the Red Cross reminds all parties to Gulf conflict of their commitments as signatories to 1949 Geneva Convention.
- ◆ Lebanon requests Security Council to extend mandate of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for further period of six months, until 31 July.

Following the onset of military confrontation last night in the Persian Gulf, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar told the press an hour and a half after the first strikes that he was deeply saddened by the beginning of hostilities. But, he said, those hostilities came within the framework of the Security Council resolutions.

When asked this morning for his reactions to last night's events, he told correspondents that, "in view of the failure of diplomacy, we couldn't expect anything different". As to his role now that war had erupted, the Secretary-General said, "For the time being, I don't think that it's time for diplomacy at this very moment, which means that there's not much I can do."

When asked later today if he saw any prospect for peace any time soon, the Secretary-General replied, "It depends on Iraq, whether Iraq capitulates."

During consultations among Security Council members last night, three countries -- the United States, France and the United Kingdom -- informed the

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Council of ongoing developments in the Gulf. No decision was taken at those consultations, and the Secretary-General said this morning that no decision was expected.

The Secretary-General's Spokesman told correspondents at noon that Mr. Perez de Cuellar was meeting with the Ambassador of Iran, Kamal Kharrazi, who would bring to him a message from President Ali-Akbar Rafsanjani of Iran.

After that meeting, the Secretary-General was asked by correspondents if he had received indications from the Iranian representative that his country might step in as a mediator. The Secretary-General replied that Mr. Kharrazi had not mentioned anything which related to any mediation. The Secretary-General added that he thought it was "a little late for diplomacy".

Asked if hope for peace was forlorn at this moment, the Secretary-General replied that although it was unfortunate there was a war, he still hoped the Iraqis would withdraw from Kuwait.

At a Geneva meeting convened by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) to consider humanitarian assistance in connection with the Iraq-Kuwait crisis, nine countries announced pledges of some \$55 million to the relief operation -- Japan, \$38 million; Denmark, \$6 million; Sweden and the United States, \$3 million each; Norway and Switzerland, \$1.5 million each; and Finland and the United Kingdom, \$1 million each.

In a statement at the meeting, the UNDRO Co-ordinator, M'Hamed Essaafi, said information on the situation in the area had been received from emergency relief officials who had been sent to Iran, Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Inventories were being established of the likely needs of displaced persons, and co-operation from Governments of the four countries was encouraging.

In Iran, said the Co-ordinator, agency representatives wanted to ensure a co-ordinated United Nations input to the Government's response to the emergency. In Jordan, the capacity of transit camps would be expanded for up to 100,000 people. Present relief food stocks were sufficient for that number for up to three months. In Syria, an operational agreement had been signed between the Government and the United Nations on implementing a national plan of action. United Nations assistance in Jordan might be facilitated through Syrian ports, if required. Turkey, while welcoming the United Nations offer of help, wanted to see how the situation developed.

The Deputy United Nations Commissioner for Refugees, David Stafford, said that in the event of war, commercial transport to most of the region would be "uninsurable", and it would be necessary to rely on transport provided by donor Governments. Otherwise, he said, all relief supplies would be paralysed. The meeting, held on 15 January, was attended by representatives of governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.

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With the outbreak of war in the Persian Gulf, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has reminded all the parties to the conflict of their commitments as signatories to the 1949 Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in time of war.

In a communique issued today, the Red Cross said it was essential that the States involved honoured those commitments in a situation where there was "a good reason to fear" that the civilian population might suffer particular hardship.

It reminded the parties that the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons, as well as atomic weapons, was prohibited under international humanitarian law. The Red Cross confirmed that it was ready to fulfil the tasks entrusted to it by the Geneva Conventions and by its statutes as well as that of the Red Crescent Movement, and reiterated that it was available to the parties as a neutral and independent intermediary.

The Government of Lebanon has asked the Security Council to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 July.

In a letter, dated 16 January, addressed to the Secretary-General, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon, Khalil Makkawi, said the presence of UNIFIL continued to remain of utmost necessity to provide assistance and support for the civilian population faced with the violence and arbitrariness of Israeli occupation.

He said some major constructive developments had taken place in his country since the last renewal of the UNIFIL mandate. A government of national unity had been formed, representing all of the country's broad political movements, and the army had assumed complete control of the greater Beirut area.

Mr. Makkawi said it was Lebanon's expectation that the time had come for the Security Council not to tolerate any more the continuous occupation by Israel of Lebanese land and to demand the prompt implementation of the Council's resolutions. The UNIFIL mandate expires on 31 January.

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